Enumeration procedures

for the homeless

There are two groups of people whose housing, or lack of, poses particular issues for collecting Census data. The first group are people who do not have a conventional roof over their heads and who live in places such as on the streets, in parks, under bridges or in squats. The second group is comprised of people without a usual address and who are staying temporarily in accommodation such as boarding houses, refuges, hostels, hotels/motels, caravan parks or within the homes of relatives/friends (couch-surfers).

The ABS developed the 2011 Homeless Enumeration Strategy (HES) with the aim of achieving the most thorough count to date of the number of homeless people in Australia at one particular point in time. The 2011 HES had three specific aims, namely to:

- provide a national framework for planning the enumeration of homeless people
- implement the recommendations arising from the evaluation of the 2006 Census homeless enumeration
- recommend standard and appropriate methods for recording the information gathered about homeless people in order to promote data quality.

The two specific objectives were to:

- maximise the coverage of the enumeration of homeless persons through the Census
- provide relevant and useable information to policy makers and service providers regarding the number and characteristics of people sleeping rough or in improvised dwellings, in supported accommodation, or those who have no usual address.

In the lead-up to the 2011 Census, the ABS liaised with state and territory organisations in order to gain their assistance in correctly identifying accommodation likely to cater for the homeless. Prior to Census Night, ABS staff from regional offices contacted groups providing services for the homeless to identify possible sites where homeless people were likely to be located. Where possible, members of the homeless community were engaged to enumerate ‘difficult’ areas where significant numbers of homeless people were likely to spend Census Night.

For more detailed information, please refer to the ABS publication Information Paper: 2011 Census Special Enumeration Strategies (cat. no. 2911.0.55.004).